

Chairman Julius Genachowski
Prepared Remarks on National Broadband Plan
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In early July, the broadband team laid out a process for developing the national broadband plan that Congress and the President had entrusted to the FCC. The process would be open and transparent, and it would allow for public participation in ways that would be unprecedented for this agency. This process would also be data-driven, meaning there would be no pre-baked conclusions. The team would collect information and data and analyze it dispassionately.

And then it would develop policy options and other proposals to meet the imperative of creating a 21st century communications infrastructure for the U.S. to serve as a platform for robust job creation, sustained economic growth, world-leading innovation, and dynamic civic engagement.

Since that July meeting, the broadband team has conducted more than 50 public workshops and hearings, taking testimony from more than 420 expert witnesses, and visiting several parts of the country, including Austin, Texas; Cambridge, Massachusetts; Charleston, South Carolina; San Diego, California; Memphis, Tennessee and here in Washington at Gallaudet University and Georgetown Hospital.

The Broadband team issued a Notice of Inquiry, which has generated more than 66,000 pages of written comments, and 27 public notices, which have generated hundreds of additional comments. The team has also posted nearly 100 items on its blog, generating more than 725 comments, all of which have been included in the official record.

Over the course of the fall, we have heard updates from the team, which summarized this outreach, as well as the team's analysis of existing studies and data.

At our meeting last month, we heard about gaps the team had identified in our broadband infrastructure, including communities un-served and under-served by high-speed Internet providers, shortfalls in adoption, and impending shortages in spectrum. These gaps must be addressed boldly for America to take full advantage of the benefits of universal broadband.

Today, we are going to hear from our broadband team about the policy framework that can help the United States address the key broadband gaps that our nation faces.

I want to thank Blair Levin and the members of our broadband team, including leaders and staff of all the Bureaus, Offices, and staff of the FCC, who have spent late nights and weekends working on the plan. It has been both a marathon and a sprint.

But the cause of universal, affordable broadband is worthy of this Herculean effort – and the Commission is extremely grateful for the important contribution you are making the nation's future, extraordinary efforts that are so important to our country.

Blair, please proceed.

This morning we find ourselves at another Open Agenda Meeting featuring another presentation on the National Broadband Plan. It's O.K. if this reminds you of the movie "Groundhog Day," and not just because Blair Levin is constantly channeling Bill Murray.

As people may recall from the movie, there comes a time when our protagonist has learned the lessons he's going to learn. The cycle stops, and he has to move forward, applying the wisdom he's attained. That moment is arriving for the National Broadband Plan.

No, that doesn't mean the Commission's work is done. Far from it. But we've reached the point of transition from collecting and analyzing information to formulating policy and recommendations.

Today's presentation has given us a great start on that journey. One bullet point that struck a particular chord with me is your reminder that, in crafting a sustainable broadband plan, we must be both aspirational in setting ambitious goals, and practical in how we seek to achieve them.

Aspirational, because the opportunities for the country are truly immense, and broadband can be our nation's enduring engine for job creation, sustained economic growth, world-leading innovation, and dynamic civic engagement. We must think big about goals. About what our country can achieve.

We must also be practical, reflecting the hard truths – such as bringing broadband to every corner of America poses real economic and business model challenges; to increase broadband adoption rates we must overcome multiple impediments; progress will require massive private investment; the U.S. has for too many years lagged globally in broadband measures; and still, we must pursue aspirations in a time of real fiscal constraint.

In short, we face difficult challenges, choices and trade-offs. Fully realizing the enormous promise of broadband will take a strong national commitment over a sustained period of time. That will start with the Commission, where the Broadband Plan in February will be both an end, and also the beginning of an intense period of many months of work – and ongoing work even beyond that as technology, markets, and public needs evolve.

I appreciate your good work in pointing us toward the principles that should guide the tough choices ahead. The Broadband team, including all of the Bureaus and Offices who have worked hand-in-hand on all parts of the effort, have provided us with a decisional and policy framework for tackling the short-, medium-, and long-term challenges of creating durable, future-oriented policies in a field marked by ever-accelerating technological change.

This is a daunting task. But its difficulty merely increases the urgency of advancing now toward our ultimate goal of creating a ubiquitous broadband infrastructure that addresses the growing costs of digital exclusion and that will allow every American to enjoy the extraordinary benefits that high-speed Internet access can provide.

I look forward to January, when you will supplement this work with a focus on what Congress called 'national purposes' – laying out a framework for using broadband to advance goals around key national objectives listed in the statute such as education, health care, energy

efficiency, public safety, civic engagement, entrepreneurial activity, private sector investment, job creation, and the other items mentioned in the statute.

The importance of this work was driven home to me just hours ago, when I visited Jefferson Middle School with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and FTC Chairman Jon Leibowitz. Connecting these classrooms to the Internet with donated computers has enabled students to access a world of information beyond the school's walls. Unfortunately, 40 percent of Jefferson's students don't have broadband at home, denying them full digital citizenship and even greater opportunities.

Reflecting on today's presentation and thinking about the hard work we have ahead of us, I would make just a few specific observations.

First, you've made it clear that FCC rules and policies will have to be updated for our broadband future, starting with the Universal Service Fund. To meet Congress's goal of universal access to broadband, we will have to begin the process of redirecting USF over time to support affordable broadband service.

USF can be a powerful tool – perhaps our most powerful tool – to enable the widespread deployment of high-speed broadband networks that will bring so many benefits, such as: empowering small businesses all over America to compete across the country and across the globe; helping farmers grow their products and their markets; bringing world-class teachers into the homes of students at risk of being left behind; ensuring that tribal lands are connected to the broad web of commerce and information; allowing seniors to have the benefits of remote diagnostics and treatment; and enabling citizens to participate in their government no matter where they live.

But as everyone in this room is aware, universalizing broadband will not be easy—and fully achieving this transformation may take years. We could choose to kick the USF can further down the road. But for the many reasons we've heard today, the right choice is to begin to ensure that we channel the Fund to support, as smartly and efficiently as possible, the technologies of today and tomorrow—and not the technologies of the past.

Second, the work of the broadband team has made clear that broadband is the future of mobile, and that mobile must be a critical piece of our broadband strategy. There may be no greater spur to America's global competitiveness.

For the next decade and beyond, the mobile revolution that is now underway can be a major driver of job creation, economic growth, and innovation. It can be a key part of the solution to vital national challenges like education, health care, energy efficiency, public safety and information delivery. Our commitment to mobile broadband will determine just how much of this promise America realizes.

But as we've learned over the course of the broadband plan process, to ensure a bright mobile future for our country we will need to focus on spectrum, one of our country's most important assets.

And the record contains powerful evidence that the demand on our commercial mobile spectrum is on a course to outstrip the supply. This means that we'll need to pursue policies to promote greater spectrum and device efficiency and ensure there is sufficient spectrum for

mobile broadband. It's of course our obligation to ensure that spectrum is used to serve the full range of public needs.

I look forward to the ongoing work of our strong staff on this topic, and to working with my colleagues and all stakeholders to find the best ways to achieve all of the essential goals that spectrum can offer.

The third clear message of our broadband team's efforts: The costs of digital exclusion are high, and getting much higher as everything from job applications to health information moves online. Digital literacy is fast becoming as vital as knowing how to read.

We will have to tackle with focused energy and creativity the essential goal of ensuring that every American – young and old, urban and rural, regardless of disability – is connected to the broadband future.

Any focus on our future appropriately begins with our children. In recent weeks, the cable industry, in response to our broadband efforts and working with our broadband team, has stepped forward with a significant program for bringing broadband to students from households that may be unable to afford it otherwise.

The Adoption Plus program will, for the next two years, provide digital literacy education, discounted computers, and discounted broadband service to low-income households with middle-school-aged children. I commend this initiative, and I hope it is the first of other initiatives to promote broadband adoption in communities that are lagging behind.

Of course, the goal of ensuring adoption and accessibility must apply to Americans of all ages—no one should miss out on a job opportunity; or the chance to consult with a medical specialist; or the ability to communicate with a son, daughter, husband or wife serving overseas, because they lack access to the Internet.

As we heard today, affordability is a substantial barrier to adoption for many people. The bill that Sen. Rockefeller introduced this week to extend the Lifeline program to broadband on a pilot basis is a great step forward in beginning to address this need.

Another step forward would be for broadband providers to take the initiative and design an affordable offering for low-income households. Of course, providers would need to assess how best to craft such a program to fit the marketplace.

But as part of a national broadband commitment, it would be great if providers offer a very basic broadband service to consumers for whom affordability is the most significant barrier. I hope that private industry can step up to the plate and develop such an offering.

In general, I believe both public and private sector initiatives will be essential to expanding broadband. Any plan we develop will rely upon private sector investment and competition wherever and whenever possible to bring the benefits of broadband to the nation.

Where private sector efforts fall short or need a spur the government can complement those efforts with policy initiatives to fill gaps and fulfill overarching policy objectives for the country. The bottom line reality we face is that neither the private sector nor the public sector can do it alone.

Last, we've seen from the broadband team the importance to deployment, adoption, and innovation of empowering consumers and promoting competition—for example, by ensuring that Americans have accurate information about the speed and quality of broadband service they are receiving.

Transparency and accuracy of information are essential to the proper functioning of markets and to the kind of comparison shopping that will foster competition among broadband providers. Indeed, improving the quality of information available to consumers is among the least intrusive and most effective measures that government can take to improve quality and lower cost.

I look forward to finding ways to provide clear, standardized, and easily-understandable measures of broadband service and quality.

While our focus is on finalizing a plan in the next 60 days, our work won't end when we submit that plan to Congress. Rulemakings and other work will follow. I want to thank the broadband team and the staff of the FCC for getting us off to such a strong start on this process, and to thank my colleagues, their staff, and the staff of the entire agency for their past, present, and future work on this difficult but vital task for the country.